

The Influencers - Transcript

Medina Shura, Mother-in-law, Ethiopia

It was difficult and painful during our time. We would deliver at home after a prolonged labour. Sometimes 3 or 4 days. I lost many children. Three survived but seven died.

Voice Over

Deaths like these can be prevented.

At BBC Media Action we help women like Medina to have safer pregnancies and healthier babies. We do this by inspiring pregnant women and those who influence them like their husbands and mothers-in-law to believe they can and should do things differently.

This film shows how we did this in Bangladesh and Ethiopia and the impact we had.

Hilina Assefa, Senior Research Officer, BBC Media Action, Ethiopia

At the beginning of the project the findings show delivering at health facilities was not a norm, feeding your baby colostrum; the first yellow milk people think that like it will harm the baby it will make the baby sick. Most husbands were not supportive of their wife's pregnancy, they see it as a woman's thing.

Mahmuda Haque, Senior Research Officer, BBC Media Action, Bangladesh

If you think about Bangladesh most of the people want home delivery because it's a traditional practice the mother-in-law they are not very supportive regarding ANC (ante-natal care) care, here a girl has little freedom

Andinet Bayissa, Head of Programmes, BBC Media Action, Ethiopia

We are focused on the influencers, without them we're not going anywhere we can't have an impact we can't have change.

Voice Over

To bring about change we made sure that husbands and mothers-in-law wanted to listen to our radio programmes in Ethiopia and watch our TV programmes in Bangladesh. We gave them accurate knowledge, engaged them emotionally, showed them different ways of doing things, and motivated them by showing recognizable people like them providing better advice and support.

Bashar Georgis, Director TV Drama “Ujan Ganager Naiya”, Bangladesh

The way we designed the drama it's like for the family core members like mother-in-law and husbands and our expectation was you know people will learn you know how to treat a woman, how to treat a pregnant woman, you know, how to treat a newborn

Sabia Khatun, Mother-in-law, Bangladesh

I didn't like the mother-in-law not allowing the daughter to go to hospital during labour. She insisted on a home birth with a traditional birth assistant. The girl was in pain and the baby was stuck. It was hard to watch that

Richard Lace, Country Director, BBC Media Action, Bangladesh

One of the things we try to do with those influencer characters is to tell their story through the drama, and you'll often see for example a mother-in-law who starts off as resistant and traditional and not allowing her daughter-in-law to undertake good practice, you'll see her shift as the drama moves on, so that she's learning and growing and improving her own knowledge as the story develops.

Voice Over

In Ethiopia radio is the best way to reach a rural population.

Andinet Bayissa, Head of Programmes, BBC Media Action Ethiopia

We created these husbands corner targeting them and we have produced some public service announcement targeting mothers-in-law

Ashagre Hailu, Senior Radio Producer Biiftuu Jireenya, Ethiopia

Many episodes of our programme we put the two, the role models and the bad experience of different mothers. We let the listeners to compare and contrast the benefits of going for health facility or staying behind at home.

Voice Over

So what difference did these drama and factual programmes actually make? Were influencers inspired to be part of the change?

21 million people listened to our radio health programmes in Ethiopia in 2016

Andinet Bayissa, Head of Programmes, BBC Media Action, Ethiopia

We have seen that a lot of discussions are happening in the household because of our programming, and husbands are also changing these norms as they become more supportive of their wives than they used to be.

Hessen Beshire, Husband and Father, Ethiopia

We thought husbands are only supposed to work in the fields, not do home chores. But after listening to Biiftuu Jireenya, I decided to fetch water and help with other work when she's pregnant. I also went with her to the antenatal checkups.

Voice Over

In Ethiopia our research data also showed that husbands who listened to our programmes were three times more likely to know what preparations to make to ensure a safe birth compared to husbands who didn't listen. They were more likely to say that people in their community arrange transport to take a woman to the health facility to give birth, and they were almost twice as likely to believe that people would approve if they fed their newborn baby only breast milk rather than traditional harmful food like butter.

32 million people watched our TV health programmes in Bangladesh.

Shajeda Aktar, Pregnant Woman, Bangladesh

After watching the drama, mothers-in-law and mothers have become more aware of the need to take their daughters for checkups when they are pregnant.

Voice Over

Our research data also showed in Bangladesh that husbands and mothers-in-law who watched our programmes were twice as likely to believe that husbands should support their wives to go for antenatal checkups compared to those who didn't watch. Husbands were three times more likely to provide accurate advice like the need for antenatal checkups and that a woman should go as soon as she is pregnant. Mothers-in-law were twice as likely to know how to clean and prepare a room in which a woman will give birth and to know the birth should be assisted by a qualified health worker.

It's clear that when those who can influence women gain accurate knowledge, shift their perceptions of what is typical in their community, feel they can do things differently and provide better advice and support, then healthier practices and behaviours become the new normal.